

## HEALTHY TEETH AND GUMS

Dental disease is the nation's leading chronic disease of children and dental disease is largely preventable. Prevention is relatively inexpensive. In 1999, the average cost of treating one tooth with a dental sealant was \$29, compared to the average cost of \$65.09 for one "silver" filling. Lack of insurance, low family income and low parental education level are significantly associated with the lack of preventive dental care.

### TENNESSEE DATA



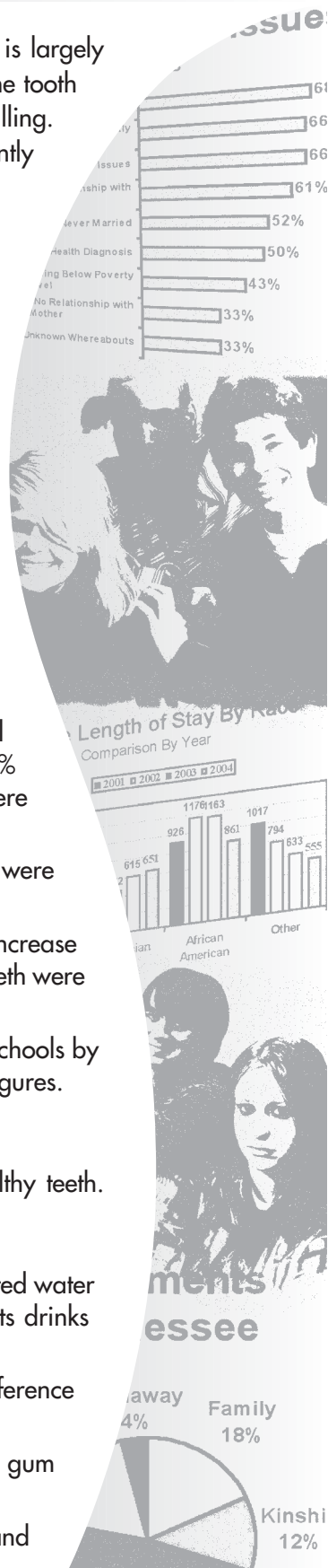
- The TennCare utilization rate among children and youth ages 3-20 has increased from 36% in federal fiscal year 2002 to 51% in federal fiscal year 2004 (Private sector utilization ranges from 50% to 60%). This represents a 42% increase in a two year period.
- The number of participants in the TennCare dental provider network has doubled since 2002. An estimated 25% of all practicing Tennessee dentists are actively participating in the program, and 86% of participating dentists are accepting new patients, indicating additional capacity within Tennessee's existing dental network.
- As a result of greater dentist participation in the TennCare program, patient travel time to the dentist has decreased significantly - average distance from an enrollee to a participating dentist is approximately four miles.
- During July 1, 2003- June 30, 2004, school based dental prevention services were delivered in all 13 regions of the state. Data show that 144,020 children had dental screenings in 381 schools. The number of children screened represents a 40% increase between July 1, 2002 - June 30, 2003. Of these, 42,455 children were referred for unmet dental needs.
- Comprehensive preventive services (including all aspects of the preventive program) were provided in 328 schools. Full dental exams were conducted on 67,719 children.
- A total number of 289,956 teeth were sealed on 47,645 children. This is a 34% increase in the number of teeth sealed and a 17% increase in the number of children whose teeth were sealed over the 2002-2003 fiscal year.
- Approximately 160,000 children received oral health education programs at their schools by a public health hygienist. This is a 26% increase over the 2002-2003 fiscal year figures.

### BEST PRACTICES



Preventive oral health is integral to general health and means much more than healthy teeth. Below are several areas of concern:

- *Good nutrition and diet habits:* Many teens are not receiving the benefits of fluoridated water because they are drinking bottled water, and sugared carbonated sodas and sports drinks may contribute to tooth decay.
- *Oral piercing:* Oral piercing can cause infection, chipped or cracked teeth and interference with dental X-rays.
- *Tobacco use:* Using spit tobacco, also known as "chew" or "smoke" can result in gum recession, tooth decay, oral lesions and oral cancers as well as nicotine addiction.
- *Sports injuries and protective mouth gear:* About one third of all dental injuries and approximately 19 percent of head and face injuries are sports-related.



- *Eating disorders:* Anorexia and bulimia also can result in damage to teeth. Poor nutritional intake associated with anorexia means a loss of calcium. Stomach acids from the constant vomiting symptomatic of bulimia erode the enamel on the teeth.

Experts have suggested the following steps as a start to improving access to oral health services for adolescents.

- Improve access to dental care by expanding preventive care to poor inner-city and rural youth through school-based programs.
- Improve Medicaid coverage for patients and reimbursements for dentists, and provide incentives for dentists to practice in underserved areas.
- Extend dental office hours or provide an on-call service to answer questions.



## 2010 Objectives

### **INCREASE ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE**

- By 2010, increase the proportion of Medicaid eligible 3 to 20 year-olds who access dental services to 80%, from the 2003 baseline of 46%.

### **REDUCE DENTAL DECAY**

- By 2010, establish baseline data on the proportion of adolescents with untreated decay in their permanent teeth.

### **Websites**

American Dental Association  
[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center  
[www.mchoralhealth.org](http://www.mchoralhealth.org)

Tennessee Department of Health  
<http://www.state.tn.us/health/>

TennCare, Dental Office  
[http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/dental/dental\\_index.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/dental/dental_index.htm)